

Exam Practice

by Alina Becker

For the article:

Will the UK ‘give up’ Gibraltar next? In Spain, we’re more worried about Brexit’s absurdities.

World and Press, 1st February issue 2025, page 2, 773 words



Topics: UK • Gibraltar • Brexit • politics • history

Skills: comprehension • analysis • discussion • writing a formal letter

Answers: see pages 2 to 4

Language variety: British English

Exam Practice

Preliminary Information



Map showing Gibraltar (UK), southern Spain (EU), and northern Morocco (Africa). | Photo: K. Szabolcs, Getty Images



View from the Spanish mainland towards Gibraltar, also called the Rock. | Photo: fhm, Getty Images

- **Chagos Islands** (subhead, para. 1) – British Overseas Territory comprising a group of islands in the Indian Ocean; claimed by Mauritius since Mauritian independence in 1968; in 2024, the British government announced it would hand over the territory to Mauritius
- **UEFA** (para. 2) – acronym for the *Union of European Football Associations*
- **Keir Starmer** (para. 3) – British prime minister since July 2024; leader of the Labour Party since 2020
- **European Commission** (para. 6) – executive body of the EU; proposes new laws that the European Parliament and the European Council adopt; manages EU policies and the EU budget; consists of 27 members (one from each EU state)
- **Schengen area** (para. 6) – zone of 29 European countries; has abolished internal border controls and allows free movement (living, working, travelling) in its member countries without a passport or visa
- **David Cameron** (para. 8) – British Conservative politician and member of the House of Lords; former British prime minister (2010–2016); former leader of the Conservative Party (2005–2016); foreign secretary (2023–2024); known to have initiated the 2016 Brexit referendum
- **Tory** (para. 8) – member or supporter of the Conservative Party in the UK

Assignments

1. Comprehension

Summarise Gibraltar's situation before Brexit and the key changes brought by Brexit.

2. Analysis

Analyse Gibraltar's unique position and the challenges it faces after Brexit because of that position.

3. Discussion / letter to the British prime minister

Choose **one** of the following tasks.

a) **Discuss** the pros and cons of introducing border controls between Gibraltar and Spain.

OR

b) **Write** a letter to the British prime minister, Keir Starmer. Imagine you are a resident of Gibraltar and you want to share your opinion on Gibraltar's situation after Brexit and make demands about how Brexit should be handled. Write approximately 300 words.

Answer Key

Assignments

1. Sample points

Before Brexit:

- Gibraltar has been under British rule for over 300 years (para. 2).
- It is considered a non-self-governing territory by the UN (para. 2).
- In the 2016 Brexit referendum, almost all voters in Gibraltar rejected Brexit. (para. 1).
- Gibraltar has repeatedly stressed that it remains under UK sovereignty (para. 4).

Key changes after Brexit:

- Gibraltar was excluded from the terms of the UK–EU withdrawal agreement (para. 5).
- Many Brexit rules have not been enforced, and few restrictions have been imposed by either the British or the Spanish side (para. 5).
- Gibraltar has been subject to ongoing negotiations between Spain, the UK, and the EU, focussing on Gibraltar potentially joining the EU's passport-free Schengen area (paras. 5, 6).
- Further changes and restrictions can be expected as more requirements come into effect (para. 5).
- Freedom of movement has become a primary concern for Gibraltar. The UK government wants to keep an open border with Spain, but new EU biometric control requirements for non-EU citizens create a border barrier between Gibraltar and the Spanish mainland (paras. 5–8).
- Tensions exist over potential Spanish police patrols at Gibraltar's airport and port (para. 6).
- The situation threatens the livelihoods of residents and the daily cross-border workers (para. 4).
- Spain's primary concerns are illegal trafficking, policing, and workers' mobility (para. 11).
- Identity has become less of an issue: Spain has never formally recognized Gibraltar's sovereignty. Only Spanish right and far-right parties occasionally protest against the recognition of British sovereignty, but the Spanish public mostly ignores or makes jokes about this issue (paras. 7, 9–11).
- British Conservatives gave little consideration to Brexit's consequences for Gibraltar. Today, however, some Conservatives and their allies are using the developments in the Chagos Islands to try to rekindle imperial sentiment and raise concerns about Gibraltar's future (paras. 3, 8).

2. Sample points

Gibraltar is in a unique position because it is a small British territory with only 34,000 residents that is surrounded by the sea but also connected to the Spanish mainland by a land border (para. 4 and preliminary information). After Brexit, it is now a non-EU territory (UK) separated from EU territory (Spain). This leads to a complex web of challenges for Gibraltar, which are mainly characterised by uncertainty. Even if an agreement is reached between the UK, Spain, and the EU, the long-term implications of that agreement will be unknown.

- **Economic challenges:** There is a lot of uncertainty surrounding Gibraltar's future economic relationship with the EU. Gibraltar faces a potential disruption to the local economy due to new border controls that threaten the livelihoods of residents and the workers who cross the border daily. There is a potential for more restrictive measures as Brexit rules are more fully implemented (paras. 4–6).
- **Political challenges:** The ongoing tensions and negotiations between Spain, UK, and the EU focus on border controls, access to the Schengen area, policing, illegal trafficking, and the challenge of balancing British sovereignty with the need for freedom of movement. Further challenges include the evolving public opinion regarding Gibraltar's status and the difficulty of managing the regional tensions caused by the opposing interests of Andalucía (the region bordering Gibraltar) and the Spanish government (paras. 6, 7, 9–11).

In conclusion, Gibraltar has to navigate the economic and political uncertainties and tensions resulting from its unique position after Brexit. It faces the challenge of balancing the disconnect between local

desires (96% voted against Brexit) and the reality of Brexit. Its non-EU British status means that it has to reconcile the “absurdities” and the burden of Brexit implementation with the need for closer ties to the EU and Spain (paras. 4, 11). The situation underscores the broader challenges of Brexit’s impact on regions with complex historical and geographical contexts, which, like Gibraltar, have to deal with the consequences of the decision to exit the EU – a decision that they themselves largely rejected. Because the decision about the Chagos Island has prompted a discussion about Gibraltar’s identity, one might also conclude that such sovereignty shifts in regions that were previously part of the British Empire have the potential to uncover underlying tensions about the UK’s colonial legacy.

3.

a) **Students might elaborate on the following points:**

Pros (of introducing border controls):

- Border controls are needed to control illegal trafficking from Gibraltar to Spain and the EU. Goods imported into the EU need to be properly taxed and must conform to regulations.
- Border controls will help maintain security standards between the EU and a non-EU country.
- This will maintain the connection between Gibraltar and the UK. For over 300 years, the two have been connected economically and culturally.
- If we keep the border open now, people in Gibraltar might eventually become interested in joining Spain and the EU.
- Border controls are the reality of Brexit, and we have to act accordingly. We have already waited many years to impose the restrictions that come along with Brexit, so we can’t wait any longer.

Cons (of introducing border controls):

- This will have economic disadvantages for Gibraltar and the UK due to the various challenges that border checks will bring.
- Commuting will become very time-consuming. This will affect Gibraltar residents working in Spain and Spanish people working in Gibraltar.
- Delivering goods to Gibraltar will become time-consuming and might become more expensive.
- EU tourists in Spain might not visit Gibraltar anymore and will not spend money there.
- Cultural or educational exchange between Gibraltar and Spain will be too difficult. Gibraltar is very small, and its residents should have the ability to cross the border, without restrictions, so that they can access educational and cultural facilities.
- People in Gibraltar didn’t want Brexit. This has to be taken into account when managing Brexit’s realities in the territory.
- Overall, this might cause people in Gibraltar to become interested in the idea of becoming independent from the UK and joining Spain and the EU to avoid economic disadvantages and difficulties at the border.

b) **Possible points and formal aspects**

Register: Use formal register.

Structure of a formal letter: sender’s and recipient’s address* • salutation • introduction • body • conclusion • closing • signature

* **Tip for teachers!**  **The recipient’s address can be provided in this case.**

The Rt Hon Keir Starmer MP
The Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London
SW1A 2AA
UK

Salutation: “Dear Prime Minister,”

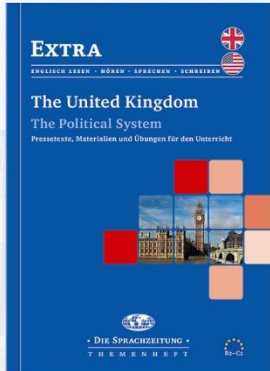
Introduction: Introduce yourself, and say why you are writing to the prime minister.

Body: Depending on the students' opinions or the roles they take on, students will elaborate on some of the points given in task 3 a). Students are welcome to give examples or tell short anecdotes about border crossings or other issues relating to Brexit. Students should include some demands about how Brexit should be handled from the Gibraltar perspective.

Conclusion: Summarise your main points, and include a call for action.

Closing: Use "Yours sincerely", which is used in British English when a specific recipient is addressed by name, as is the case here.

Signature: Sign with your full name.



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